TEACHING ENGLISH

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EDITORIAL

NO WHAT WITHOUT HOW

In discussions of the new pre-university course a great many opinions have been expressed as to what should be taught as a preparation for university studies, and this has led, too, to a good deal of discussion of what should be taught in the university proper. It is unfortunate that in all this discussion of "what" there should be so little attention to "how"; yet in the university, as in the school, what we teach is strictly conditioned by how we teach it. The argument as to whether literature or poetry should be taught or not is soon settled if we ask the further question of how it is to be taught. If it is to be the basis of a great deal of tedious explanation that the lecturer or teacher finds it difficult to give and the pupil impossible to follow, the answer must be an emphatic "NO". If, on the other hand it is to be the direct presentation, dramatically and compellingly of the working of the most lively, original and vigorous minds we know, in relation to life and experience, with as little dilution in the colourless words of the classroom as possible, the answer will be an equally emphatic "YES". If the aim of the teaching is that the pupil should be able to reproduce various other people's opinions on the work, and if we flatten a work of genius down within reach of the pupil's pedestrian experience in the form of a summary or explanation which is to take the place of the actual work in the pupil's mind, the answer is an unfailing "NO"; if, on the other hand the aim is to raise the perception and widen the experience of the pupil towards a full realization of the work itself—partial at first, perhaps, but open to further knowledge through further contact—the answer will be an equally unfailing "YES". If we are to try to inject into the mind of a student the results in concentrated form of the work of generations of scholars the answer is a decisive "No"; if, however, we limit ourselves strictly to a preparation that includes only enough factual material to arouse the interest of the student and a presentation of the work itself that puts the complete work as quickly and economically as possible within the reach of the student for him to deal with himself, the answer is an equally decisive "YES". If our examination is designed to show that the student has collected facts about a piece of literature like postage stamps, to remain stuck in a row for inspection in his

mind until the examination is over, our answer is bound to be "NO", but if our examination is designed to show that contact with a masterpiece has set the student thinking and helped him to develop and mature, our answer may well be "YES". In short, if learning or reading literature or poetry is bound to clog the mind, we shall decide against it; if it is likely to open it up, we shall decide to include it. Equally, if we have failed to find a technique for presenting the material we wish to present, or if the student is unable to take what we offer, we must change our minds about what we try to give, or else set about finding a technique of presentation that will somehow bring it within the student's reach. "What" depends at every point on "How".

It is quite clear that the majority of university students—and not only university students—are unable to remember much of what they hear in a lecture, even if they understand it, unless they are given an opportunity to work over the material in their minds afterwards. The traditional way of doing this was in seminars or tutorials in which the student had the opportunity to ask his tutor questions and discuss his difficulties. With 100 or more students in a class this sort of contact with the teaching staff seems impossible. Yet the working in of material into the mind is as important as the presenting of it, just as the rolling in of stones to make a road is as important as the laying of them. Some lecturers try to ensure something being learnt by presenting only the essential percentage of what a good student might remember of a lecture in the form of notes, which can be learnt by heart. Yet experience with condensed information, whether in the form of grammar or potted history, is that it is not memorable except as a reminder of a larger more human story learnt previously. Skeletons are not to be found anywhere in nature, either living or capable of doing work.

One way to bring the material of lectures within the reach of students is to train lecturers to simplify their language, avoid all complicated or unusual expressions and enunciate their words clearly, and—now audiences are so large—to produce their voices adequately. But more effective presentation of material is solving only one side of the problem, there is still the other side—the acceptance. To make this more effective, some sort of organized discussion in small manageable groups should follow every lecture ; and even the presentation could be more effective, as Dr. Thangavelu's article in our last number suggested, if it were done co-operatively by groups of students under the guidance of their teachers. Our students must be shown

how they can help themselves, and how their interaction on one another can be an educative factor. So as to give our readers information on another aspect of the group method of self-teaching, we have invited a contribution from Mr. Isenberg, the Representative of the Ford Foundation with the South Indian Book Trust on the so-called "Great Books Scheme", with which he was connected for some time, in America. We are sure that the answers of many of the problems that at present seem unanswerable, both in the university and in the school, may be found in one or other, or perhaps in several at once, of these group co-operative methods of self-instruction.

When we have ventilated the question of "how" and found a way to stimulate our students to fruitful activity, training them to find out for themselves what is within their reach, we may return to the question of "what". In the meantime we should teach what we can, in practice, teach effectively, and from our observation of what our students are able to absorb—what helps them to develop and grow—plan our syllabus. If this falls short of our ideal it is a pity, but a pile of unassimilated knowledge of unrelated facts soon vanishes from the mind; to cram more apples into the basket than it will contain can never be worth while.

DICTATION

By J. G. Bruton

For the students of any foreign language, dictation is a useful and necessary exercise in that it can give practice in the most essential skill of linking together the spoken and written forms, and since this particular skill is particularly difficult to achieve in English because of its peculiar orthography, there is particular value in the use of dictation in English classes. But there is great danger in allowing preoccupation with the difficulties of English spelling to lead us into looking upon dictation purely and simply as a spelling test, and not as a test of the ability to comprehend spoken English, which it primarily is. When we offer dictation to our students, we are in effect saying, "Here is an example of spoken English: do you understand it, and if you do, can you write it down intelligibly?" Obviously, even in dictation viewed from this standpoint, the necessity for correct spelling is not lost sight of, but it becomes a secondary issue.

If we wish to test our students' ability to spell, dictation is a very wasteful method of doing it, and we should achieve our end much more efficiently and quickly by administering at regular intervals straightforward spelling tests. The ability to spell English words correctly depends upon the quality of our visual memory of those words; it must be so since there are no really trustworthy rules to guide us, and since analogy does not usually help. It is interesting to note in this connection what most of us do if in writing we have to use a word of whose spelling we are uncertain: we write it down in several versions and choose what we think is the correct one merely on the evidence of our eyes, and not by the application of any rules or analogies. It follows therefore that children who are learning English, whether as a native or a foreign language, need to be given the maximum opportunity possible for seeing words, especially the ones that give trouble, in their written form. An intelligently composed text-book will normally give this opportunity by means of frequent repetition of new words introduced, but even this practice may need to be supplemented by the use of flash-cards and the blackboard. If some pupils persistently misspell certain words the only real remedy is the classic one of making them copy the correct spelling 10, 20 or 30 times.

As yet little is known about the processes by which we convert speech sounds into mental images, and the further ones by which we may convert these into written symbols, but obviously practice will develop the skills involved, and dictation is the only easy form of exercise available which makes this practice possible. It should therefore be used frequently but judiciously and should not be allowed to become burdensome. Short frequent dictations of 6 or 7 lines achieve this particular purpose much more happily than passages of 20 or 25 lines given infrequently, which inevitably exhaust pupils' reserves of concentration. Experiment has shown that children are capable of a high level of concentration, of the sort that dictation demands, for relatively short periods, and it seems logical therefore not to make excessive demands of them in this direction.

Dictation cannot teach anything new, it can only test existing knowledge. It follows, therefore, that passages for dictation should contain only familiar material, although this should not mean that we say to our pupils "Study lines 1--10 on page 23: I will give this to you on Friday as a dictation." If we do this, dictation then becomes not a test of comprehension, but of memory. We may quite legitimately ask our pupils to study a certain passage and then base our dictation on the vocabulary

and other items to be found in it, remembering always our objective of testing comprehension.

In reading the actual dictation, we should make full use of the conversational forms of spoken English, because it is comprehension of this type of English that we are testing. We should certainly not be exaggeratedly precise in our enunciation of particular sounds and should make full use of the "weak" forms of English speech. Perhaps an example will illustrate my meaning more clearly: imagine that we are dictating the following passage:

> Different people *are* clever/*at* different kinds *of* work. So too,/different types *of* men/display qualities *of* mind *and* body/which fit/or unfit *them*/*for* particular kinds *of* work./

All the words underlined will be pronounced in their weak forms (ə, ət, əv, ənd, əm, fə). The passage is divided into phrases which constitute sense groups.

A passage for dictation should be read through three times.

1. At normal reading pace, to allow pupils to hear the whole passage.
2. At dictation speed, with pauses to allow pupils to write.
3. At normal speed, with pauses at full stops, to allow pupils to fill in gaps or to make alterations.

There should be a pause for revision between the last two readings. One way of lessening the burden of correction is to get one of our brighter pupils to write the dictation up on a blackboard standing on an easel with its back to the class. When we have finished dictating, we may ask our pupils to exchange papers with one another, and then turn the blackboard round. Then we may discuss the version on the blackboard, make any necessary alterations and then ask our pupils to correct the papers in front of them. They will need guidance in assessing the gravity of mistakes, but even so, our labour will be greatly reduced. An obvious consequence of looking upon dictation as a comprehension test is that mistakes due to failure to understand should be more heavily penalised than simple spelling mistakes.

A SIXTEENTH CENTURY SCHOOLMASTER AND THE GRAMMAR LESSON

By B. Hensman, M.A., Ph.D.

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I. The Unchanging Problem

"Where the common way used in common schools is to read the grammar alone by itself, it is tedious for the master, hard for the scholar, and cold and uncomfortable for them both." Thus wrote Roger Ascham four hundred years ago in *The Scholemaster,* a book which embodies the mellow experience of a man who had spent the best years of his life teaching boys to express themselves in Latin. The Latin language was at that time the medium of instruction in all colleges throughout Europe; it was the international spoken language as well as the language in which all books of higher learning were written. Thus the teachers in the high schools, the "grammar schools", of Ascham's day, faced the very same problem as teachers of English in India today. We too must experiment to discover ways of teaching the drills and disciplines of language in such a way that the grammar lesson does not become tedious, cold and uncomfortable for both teacher and pupil.

Neither the teaching problem nor the nature of boys has changed much since Ascham's day, so his experience is worth considering, seeing that his then revolutionary methods produced such brilliant results.

In the first place Ascham insists that the teaching of grammar should arise from a situation or from the context in which a particular form or usage occurs. For the teacher of English in India the situations need not be confined, as Ascham's were, to first-class authors; but they should still arise naturally in the course of reading or else be presented as communicating an idea which no other words will convey exactly. Grammar is therefore power over ideas rather than dissection of the dry bones of a grammar book. And Ascham's procedure is a sound one; "First", he says, "teach the child cheerfully and plainly the cause (i.e. the background and context) of the passage, so oft, as the child may carry away the understanding of it." In modern terminology the communication of the concept comes first. The teacher must then go over the pattern of words, over and over again, until the pupil has literally "taken it in". Only then should the teacher go on, if at all, to a formal explanation of how the

familiar words produce the special effects or the particularised shade of meaning which they do.

Simple explanation and patient, interesting repetition is Ascham's first procedure. Only when understanding is established does he proceed to give a variety of exercises based on the passage, and using the now familiar pattern of words. One of his exercises involves taking a model sentence or group of sentences and substituting other verbs and nouns.

Here again we follow a good preceptor, for words themselves are not the units of a sentence. They are the interchangeable parts of a sentence structure. Only when the pupil has mastered the structure and has understood what it conveys can the teacher expect him to reproduce it in exercises. And a very useful exercise consists in taking one basic sentence structure and replacing endlessly all the nouns and verbs from a known vocabulary.

Although Ascham uses various devices for giving his boys power over words he defers to a very late stage any exercises which demand sustained original speech or composition. He even urges teachers to discourage their pupils from stumbling through incorrect sentences in their efforts to use their acquired second language. Instead he advocates giving the pupils a sustained experience of good language. And in his experience, they will acquire good speech habits which will remain with them for the rest of their days.

Thus Ascham's approach to the place of grammar in the teaching of a foreign language is surprisingly modern. For him, the rules of grammar arose from the living language, from words in their context. Nevertheless in Ascham's schoolroom as in ours, formal grammar teaching has an important place. But our task is more difficult than Ascham's, for he was teaching in days when Greek and Latin grammar were still giving the English language a disciplined shape, whereas we are dealing with the English language at a stage when the skeletal structure which gives the general shape is buried deep within a multiplicity of living and changing usages. To change the metaphor, in twentieth century English the rule is only a useful starting point; the real rules are the evolving patterns, the manifold usages of modern English.

II. The Changing, Still-Evolving Nature of English

There are two types of language: the type which expresses the relationship between ideas by means of inflections or changes in the form of words, and the type which expresses this relationship by means of a characteristic word-order eked out by other

words which point that relationship. Latin, Tamil, French and Italian are of the first type. Chinese is an extreme example of the second type, for its words undergo no changes to express gender, case or time. The English language began in Anglo-Saxon times as a language of the first type, but in the course of fifteen hundred years of usage it has travelled along the path of language-change until it is almost a language of the second type. And it is still travelling that road. In Anglo-Saxon times *sē gōda mann*....was expressed in the plural as *pā gōdan menn* ....four changes altogether, whereas in modern English we need only one change to transform *the good man departed* into *the good men departed* and not one iota of clarity has been sacrificed.

To safeguard the clarity of the language, to compensate for the loss of inflections, English has gradually taken on a basic discipline which underlies almost all sentences. This discipline is the subject-verb-object structure of English sentences. In the days of King Alfred only about 40 per cent of English sentences conformed to this pattern. In modern English 95 per cent. Osbert Sitwell, one of the most brilliant masters of modern English, emphasises the fundamental nature of this discipline when in *The Scarlet Tree* he tells of his own experience in rewriting, amending, clarifying his own compositions. This task, he says, "led me to rate the essential clarity of a sentence, the structure of it, high above all other virtues; it did not matter if the flesh clothed the bones in a Rubens-like abundance, so long as the skeleton was there to support it." How much more then is the subject-verb-object discipline a fundamental, ever-recurring drill for those who are feeling their way in English as a foreign language.

When once the sentence patterns of modern English are mastered these structures can then be clothed upon with more elaborate words. But an extensive active vocabulary is a secondary matter in the business of language learning. For example, Chinese college students find Robert Louis Stevenson a difficult author. Yet about 85 per cent of his words are within a 2,000 word vocabulary range. If words are the units of thought wherein lies the difficulty? The fact is that Robert Louis Stevenson has a tremendous power over simple words. He uses everyday words in relationships which convey an extremely wide range of emotional and descriptive effects. Similarly good modern English does not get its effectiveness from a wide vocabulary range as much as from a mastery of the effective use, the use in relationships, of comparatively simple words.

The fallacy of Basic English is that words are taken to be the

units of speech and ideas whereas the real problem of communication in English is that of setting off words in varying relationships; and these relationships often transform the supposed basic meaning. Added to this, a large number of functional changes are taking place in modern English. For instance the word *thunder* takes on a different function, as well as a different shade of meaning, in each of the following uses: *it thundered just now; he thundered at me to go away; a thunder-cloud; a thunder-sheet; a thundering scowl; a thundering ovation*; or the slightly less respectable *a thundering success.* It is an easy matter to call up innumerable additional examples of this functional-cum-meaning shift in good modern English usage. Furthermore, if we take a passage from any standard author of a hundred or more years ago and compare it with an analogous passage in a modern author we will see how far English usage has travelled towards the position of the Chinese language even since the days of Sir Walter Scott and Thackeray. Meanings, functions, sentence-patterns have all changed noticeably. And one striking thing is that many of the tense-forms of today did not exist in respectable usage one hundred years ago. One of the outstanding features of change in twentieth century English is this multiplication of ways of expressing the time relationship of ideas.

For these reasons we cannot follow Ascham when he urges us to draw our examples of good usage from classical authors, nor is his reliance on the grammar book a help, for modern English is still going on accepting these many kinds of change into its standard usage. It is because of these now-accepted changes and this still-continuing growth that the formal grammar book can be more of a hindrance than a help in acquiring an effective mastery of twentieth century English. Ascham was teaching a language which was governed by rules and inflections; but even so he referred from the grammar book to the living context. We are teaching a language which has gone on adapting its forms to living situations and the various facets of ideas. For this reason the appeal is even more from the grammar book, or the standard author, to real life. And the most effective way of teaching English, whether the material arises in the grammar book or in a given author, is to help the pupils to realise the significance of a given usage in a parallel situation in the classroom. This is not just "direct method", or the application of any set method at all; it is rather a procedure which conforms to the nature of English as a living language.

III. The Future Tense: An example of how English is still evolving and how a developing mastery of Language can be cultivated in the Classroom

This review of the usages which are expanding the Future Tense in mid-twentieth century English is but one of several possible examples to illustrate the way in which English people are evolving new arrangements of words to express differentiated situations in relationship to a verb. In this way seven or eight ways of expressing the future have come into accepted usage in the English language.

What then is the future tense? The starting point is the simple Future Tense form itself. But that is only a starting point. The rest is an expanding experience, through the school years, of how English people express future action when they want to bring into mind a special point of view or emphasis. If at the end of the experience the pupils need to enunciate rules at all, the rules will be a crystallisation of the ideas which lie behind the words. But experience of the various usages is the main thing; and so, when any one of these future tenses is used the teacher's main task is to give the pupils a maximum amount of experience in hearing the usage, understanding it in action, and using it.

All of the following usages should be looked upon as genuine future tenses although most formal grammar books would explain them as instances of one tense used instead of the genuine future tense. They are genuine future tenses because in the very nature of English as a living language the exception does not prove the rule but, when established as standard usage, is the rule.

1. In teaching the future tense the Simple Future generally comes first. There is no need to change this order. It is the simplest form of the verb and has the most comprehensive range of meaning. But as the pupil goes on through the Senior School his sensitiveness to shades of meaning increases. Then gradually he should be given training and experience in expressing these finer distinctions. In that skill lies the true "mastery of English".

2. A second usage which is tending to become blurred in Modern English is the reversal of the *shall* and *will*, so that we have I *will*, we *will*, he *shall*, you *shall*, they *shall*, they *shall* when the idea of promise or resolve is included in the verb.

The distinction between the Simple Future and this reversed form of that tense is lost altogether when we use the shorter spoken form I'll, we'll, they'll, etc., and this in itself is a sign that the distinction is not as sharp as it used to be. But the bride in an English wedding makes no generalised statement when she

says "I *will*" love, honour and obey my husband. Moreover in the Gettysburg address Lincoln was not making a generalised statement about the future when he said "government of the people, for the people, by the people shall not perish from the earth" Lincoln's *shall* embodies the force of high resolve.

3. English people have evolved a third usage which focusses attention on the deed rather than on the doer, when they say, for example, I *am selling* my house next week, or He *is leaving* for London tomorrow. This way of expressing the future should not be explained as a present continuous used as a future tense. It is a future tense which brings the actual *selling* or *leaving* vividly to mind, and is in very common use. It is used also to denote that the action is already resolved beyond question: e.g. I *am coming* next week; She *is bringing* the book for you in the morning.

Once the pupils get the idea they can invent endless examples; and both teacher and pupils will find plenty of natural occasions to use this form of the future in the classroom in natural exchange of conversation as well as in set exercises.

4. A fourth, quite recent development of the future tense is the *"am going to"* form. This usage defies definition as one of the regular tenses of formal grammar. When we meet it in its context we discover that it is a future tense used when we focus more on the subject of the verb, on the subject's resolute state of mind, than on the deed he *is going* to do. For instance the idea of "He *has come to the decision that he will* buy those books" is all contained in the simpler future usage: "He *is going to buy* those books". In this instance too, classroom experiences will give rise to situations where this tense is evoked naturally.

5. A fifth usage develops when another emphasis is at work. This *time* someone else or some special circumstances may be compelling or producing the action of the subject. When that emphasis is intended then the future tense takes yet another form, this time one which looks like the present tense of the verb *to be* plus an infinitive. e.g. She *is to read* that book before tomorrow; or, They *are to stand* in the front row; or I *am to fetch* my mother's bag tonight.

This very common usage has probably developed by analogy with the use of *"have to"* as the future form of the defective verb *must*. At present, the *"is to"* usage has not yet acquired all the idea of compulsion which lies in *"has to"*. Maybe it will not arrive at that goal, for it is a fairly recent newcomer into English usage and seems to have been devised to express a more generalised idea of compulsion than is conveyed by *"has to"*.

6. Another way of expressing the future looks exactly like the Simple Present Tense. For example, *We go there next week,* or *My father comes home next Wednesday.* This is a usage which brings the future situation vividly to mind in the present and carries with it more finality than the Simple Future. Hence, *"We'll do that tomorrow"* may be either a promise or a generalised expectation to do something, but *"We do that tomorrow"* expresses a settled decision to do it.

7. Still another way of expressing the future is increasing in use. *I shall be seeing you next Tuesday* is a more common conversational use than *I shall see you next Tuesday.* This usage carries with it an air of informality and suggests probability rather than a definite arrangement. It also focusses on the action as the context for other actions, even if those other actions are not expressed. e.g. I *will be writing* to my father tonight (and will tell him what you say). They *will be seeing us* next Sunday (and we can ask them about it).

8. Then in the Sixth Form Syllabus comes that fine test of mastery over English: Sequence of Tenses. Many teachers and pupils find this difficult because they are trying to adjust words to rules. Where the future tense comes into play there is only one rule of sequence: all dependent clauses whether adverbial or conditional, when in association with any of the future tenses, are expressed by the present tense. This is because they are imagined as happening before the action of the future tenses. And so, if he *comes*, we *will welcome* him; or, I *am to go* to London when my father goes; or they *are going to buy* a house if they *have* enough money.

These usages do not necessarily exhaust the ways of expressing the future in English. Because English is a living language people are continually experimenting with words. And in every successful experiment the controlling force is the idea behind the words. Usages have become established as Standard English because they make their point. It is in this spirit of exploring what language does that Grammar can be delivered, at least for the teacher, from being cold, uncomfortable and tedious in the classroom.

In the same way usages to cover the Past and Present meanings of verbs are open to discovery. For instance there are at least six ways of expressing a past action: she *came;* she *did come;* she *used to come;* she *was coming*; she *was to have* come; she *had come;* all these usages are conditioned by different viewpoints or emphases and all are in common use.

IV. The Grammar Book and the English Language in the Classroom

In the classroom the teacher's task is to give the pupils enough opportunities of experiencing these usages, whether in reading or writing or in the spoken word. A fund of English language-patterns cannot be taken for granted among Indian schoolchildren today. No child will reproduce accurately and automatically a pattern of words he has not heard or used many times over. A baby stores up word-patterns in response to ideas and emotions for about three years before he begins to talk freely, and for nine or ten years before he begins to use his mother tongue with any fine discrimination. The older child learning a foreign language has this absorption process speeded up for him by all kinds of devices. The effective language teacher can turn anything, even in the most poorly equipped classroom, into material language experience. Then the next steps are to provide adequate graded reading materials, to teach again and again if necessary, and to invent exercises and activities which impress the structure as an automatic response to an idea.

In this way tenses can be learnt as patterns of words which arise from real situations. As the child develops, he moves on from a vague and generalised concept of the future as one big "tomorrow". So with tense usages. They should not be taught all at once, but introduced through the school years as the need for finer distinctions arises, or as the usages are met with in books or in real life. Songs, especially of the question and answer type, ballads, simple poems, dramatised stories are all teaching devices which give rise to idiomatic structures in a living context.

But whatever follow-through is used, the teacher must be prepared to teach a given usage over and over again; to teach it deliberately and carefully several times over at well-spaced, fairly long intervals. The teaching should be followed immediately by as much oral and written practice as the time allows. And in between the definite teaching, the teacher should take pains that the pupils hear the new usages over and over again in real situations, e.g. You *are to finish* your work by three o'clock; then we *are going to* read a novel; then we *will all go home*.

When Tenses, past, present and future are studied and taught from the concept angle rather than from the rule-book standpoint, it becomes clear that Modern English Grammar has overflowed the channels set by the formal grammar books. The formal rules provide a useful map of the general shape of the language; but the rules are the merest skeleton. And like all skeletons

formal grammar is cold and uninviting. But in Modern English, *usage has taken the place of rules.* The *exceptions to the formal* grammar book rules have become the good Standard English of modern times. In other words the body of accepted exceptions has, through *respectable usage, become the rule.*

Because this transfer of authority from the grammar book to the accepted usage springs from the very nature of English as a living language, the teacher's task is not so much one of imparting a wider vocabulary as one of instilling into the pupils an increasing power over the simple words which they already know. When pupils are in the fifth and sixth forms they should be ready to seek exacter ways of expressing their ideas. In adolescence ideas precede utterance. This is the teacher's opportunity to give his pupils the pleasure which comes from increased power over words.

To return to Ascham we would wish our pupils "so to speak as it may well appear that the brain doth govern the tongue, and that the reason leadeth forth the talk."

NOTES ON "GREAT BOOKS" DISCUSSION GROUPS IN THE U. S. A.

BY ARTUR ISENBERG

"Is *Hamlet* really concerned with avenging his father's death?" "Do you agree with Locke that nationalism arises from the 'corruption and viciousness of degenerate men'?" "Do you agree with Rousseau that the only way one can claim original title to land is by cultivation and labour?" "What is Karl Marx's conception of human nature?" "Do you agree with Plato that 'the unexamined life is not worth living'?" "The American Declaration of Independence speaks of 'inalienable rights'. Are there such rights ? What are they, if they exist ?"

Week after week, from the beginning of autumn until the end of spring, questions such as these are being keenly debated in more than one thousand "GREAT BOOKS" discussion groups throughout the United States of America. A typical group consists of about twenty members whose discussions are led by two co-leaders. A glance at an actual list of the members of such a group shows a very wide range of occupations: there is a journalist, an assistant buyer, two teachers, three secretaries, a typewriter mechanic, half a dozen housewives, a chemist, three students, three sales persons and a sprinkling of other jobs. This particular group had 25 members—fifteen women and ten men. Ages ranged from about eighteen into the patriarchal seventies

with most members coming into the 15 to 35 year bracket.

Different as their social and educational backgrounds are, all these men and women have several things in common: a love of books, curiosity about ideas and their origins, a desire to discuss these common interests in an informal, friendly atmosphere of casual equality.

Discussion group rules are simple: the group wants to hear your own ideas, your own interpretation of what you have read, so don't drag the opinions of others into the discussion. The group is not interested in Professor Wisengood's learned comments on Aristotle's "Ethics": it wants to hear your comments. If you disagree with your neighbour in the group, don't call him names: take issue with his *ideas*, not with the *man*. . .Voice your opinions honestly and be prepared to take criticism in good spirit. Do not turn to the group leaders for support or guidance: that is not their task. The leaders are there to see that the discussion proceeds in a more or less orderly way, to stimulate it by asking questions; they are not teachers, for the entire venture is designed as an attempt at informal exploration of ideas. The discussions are not intended to "prove" anything or to lead to any conclusions. Hence, no attempt is made to "sum up" the discussion trends at the end of each meeting. The play of ideas itself is the thing. If listening to the ideas of others makes your own mind a little less closed and rigid, so much the better.

The discussion groups meet once every two weeks for two hours, usually in the evening, say from 7.45 to 9.45 p.m. Meeting places are normally provided by local branches of the public library system.

Let's take a quick glance at the mechanics of these meetings. Suppose that the group's first meeting is scheduled to be held on 10 September, the second on 24 September. Assignment for the first meeting: Homer's *Odyssey*; for the second meeting: Herodotus' *History*, Books I and II. The branch librarian concerned will have ordered 25 copies of the *Odyssey* and will have them on hand about the middle of August, when group members call for their copy of the book, for they are expected to have read the assignment before they meet to discuss it. The members will bring their copy to the meeting on 10 September, returning it to the librarian at the end of the meeting. At the same time, each member will pick up a copy of Herodotus' *History*, which the librarian will have ordered from the central library in the meantime. I am not familiar at first hand with the operation of the system in other cities; in New York there is no charge of any kind for books borrowed from the library.

We have seen who the group members are. Now let us have a closer look at the leaders. The Great Books Foundation—about which more later—has made it a practice to insist on two co-leaders for each group. It is the Foundation's belief that the presence of two leaders tends to prevent one-man (or, for that matter, one-woman) domination of the group. A strong personality might be tempted to use a group as a convenient forum, a captive audience, before which to parade pet ideas. While this might be interesting or even educational, it is not the purpose of the venture. Hence the insistence on dual leadership.

The discussion group leaders receive no remuneration for their services: they are volunteers and enthusiasts. They differ from the other group members in only one respect: all have had special training in group discussion techniques by qualified persons. While the training programme is not uniform, we shall not go far wrong in saying that the average leader has attended at least six two-hour training sessions.

The bi-weekly reading assignment requires an average of two hours' reading time from group members and about twice as much from the two leaders. It is not that the latter are slower readers or more dull-witted: their preparation requires a preliminary meeting of the co-leaders. At these meetings, they will first explore their own reaction to the assignment, then plan their approach to the group discussion. They will seek to reach agreement on such questions as these: What are the principal themes or ideas of the book concerned? What would be some stimulating questions to put before the group? What should be the opening question to launch the discussion?

In New York City, possible approaches to each assignment have been outlined by the Reader's Adviser's Office of the New York Public Library. Usually such an outline guide consists of just a single mimeographed (roneoed) sheet, prepared by a discussion group leader and edited by the Office staff. Printed at the bottom of each sheet is the legend: "These approaches to discussion are suggestive only, and in no sense cover the details of the reading or outline in its general form. Please note after *your* discussion valuable questions and angles that might be included in a revision of this guide." The guides are useful to the group leaders but in a way which is hard to define. For in practice they are all but ignored in the course of the actual discussion. They can, however, be used as a sort of check-list to make sure that the major topics of each assignment have received attention during the discussion.

But what of the fine plans made by the two co-leaders in

preparation of each meeting? The answer is, I think, a paradox: if the actual discussion follows these plans, then it may have been thorough, educational and anything else you may be pleased to call it. But it will have been a total failure as a real discussion. For a lively discussion is one which gets away from the leaders and which, stimulated by the unfolding of ideas contributed by group members, turns into channels as unexpected as they are unexplored. Such discussions—fortunately they are the rule rather than the exception—do not tamely wind up at 9.45 p.m.: they are continued over a cup of coffee or tea often until midnight, as the group moves *en masse* to a nearby café to have a further go at old Plato's notions or Tawney's thoughts on *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

The Great Books Foundation was established in July 1947. Its declared objective is "to provide the means of genuine liberal education for all adults". The *method* chosen to accomplish this goal is the Socratic one. Socrates, you will recall, believed that education was not so much a question of *learning* something new as of *remembering* something old. Acting on this theory, he developed a technique of learning by question-and-discussion. In a celebrated simile, Socrates referred to himself as a "gadfly" upon the Athenian society which found his perpetual questions as irritating and disquieting as the normal person finds the incessant buzzing of a small insect. It is not without significance that The Great Books Foundation named its own official journal, "The Gadfly".

The Great Books programme is usually traced back to the methods developed by the American educator, John Erskine, towards the end of World War I for the teaching of soldier-students at the University of Beaune. Returning to the United States, Erskine prevailed upon Columbia University to institute an Honours course "devoted to the reading of great books". One of his students at the time was Mortimer Adler who later transplanted the idea to Chicago, in collaboration with John M. Hutchins. The Great Books courses flourished and, in 1937, an entire college curriculum—that of St. John's College at Annapolis, Maryland,—was based on these Great Books.

The Foundation's chief practical tasks are the training of discussion group leaders, selection of books for discussion and financial assistance in printing the titles (often only the particular selections) chosen for discussion. We have already dealt with the first of these tasks, the leadership training programme. Before turning to the second, let us dispose of the third.

The books or selections chosen by the Foundation are printed

by a private firm—Henry Regnery Company, Chicago. The books cost an average of 50 cents or about $9 for a boxed set of the 18 titles which make up one year's reading. Discussion group members may buy these sets although, as we have seen, they may also borrow the individual titles as needed from the public library system. (In New York, a set of the books is presented to the discussion group leaders free of charge, the only material benefit which the leaders derive from their work.)

As for the selection of the books, the titles chosen form a pattern recurring every year: the first few titles for each year's programme are chosen from among the classical writings of the ancient Greeks, followed by Roman classics. Then, following a more or less chronological order, selections are presented from great Western writers. The last book on each year's list is usually one written by a contemporary (or recently deceased) author.

Here, in parallel columns, are the actual selections for the first and fifth year readings:

First Year

1. * ——*U. S. Declaration of Independence;*
   * ——*Excerpt from The Old Testament*
2. Plato: *Apology* and *Crito*
3. Plato: *Republic* (Books I & II)
4. Thucydides: *History* (Selections)
5. Aristophanes: *Lysistrata, Birds, Clouds*
6 & 7. Aristotle: *Ethics* (Book I) *Politics* (Book I) (2 meetings)
8. Plutarch: *Lycurgus, Numa, Alexander, Caesar*
9. St. Augustine: *Confessions* (Books I–VIII)
10. St. Thomas Aquinas: *Treatise on Law* (Selections)
11. Machiavelli: *The Prince*
12. Montaigne: *Selected Essays*
13. Shakespeare: *Hamlet*
14. Locke: *Of Civil Government* (Second Essay)
15. Rousseau: *The Social Contract* (Books I & II)
16. ** Var. Au.: Federalist Papers (Selections)
    U.S. Constitution
17. Smith: *The Wealth of Nations* (Book I)
18. Marx: *Communist Manifesto*

Fifth Year

1. Euripides: *Medea, Trojan Women, Hippolytus*
2 & 3. Plato: *Parmenides, Theaetetus* (two meetings)
4. Aristotle: *Physics* (Selections: Space & Time)
5. Virgil: *Aeneid*
6. St. Francis: *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*
7. St. Thomas: *On Man*
8 & 9. Dante: *The Divine Comedy* (2 meetings)
10. Newton: *Mathematical Principles etc.* (Selections)
11. Berkely: *Principles of Human Knowledge*
12. Pico della Mirandola: *On the Dignity of Man*
13. Boswell: *The Wisdom of Dr. Johnson.*
14. Kant: *Prolegomena to any future Metaphysics*
15. De Tocqueville; *Democracy in America*
16. Woolman: *Journal*
17. Melville: *Moby Dick*
18. Einstein: *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*

* This first meeting of the first year is intended to acquaint group members with the methods used. The method is illustrated with reference to the two titles mentioned. Both are discussed at one and the same meeting.

** Double selection for a single meeting.

If your reaction is similar to my own on first seeing such a list, you will have muttered to yourself: "Lord! What a forbidding and dull-looking conglomeration!" But it is not as bad as all that. For one thing, you need not pass any examination after reading these books. For most people, this in itself will contribute in no small measure to their ability to read with enjoyment. For another thing, you will be discussing these books—or rather your ideas about them—with your neighbours: remember, a Great Book discussion group is not a forum in which you can suddenly be called upon to argue or defend your ideas against those held by eminent scholar specialists concerning the book in question.

Perhaps a few examples may not be out of place at this point. I recall one discussion for which the assignment had been: Euclid, *Elements of Geometry*, Books I through X. As soon as we sat down, one of the members (sharing my own feelings, honesty compels me to add) begged us to give up the idea of discussing Euclid. What was there to discuss, he asked, adding that a book discussion group was not, after all, a mathematical congress. I suggested that we should just give the book a try and if his fears turned out to be justified, turn to something else to talk about. He agreed. To our astonishment, the ensuing discussion was one of the liveliest and most interesting the group ever had. No, we did not try to find flaws in Euclid's theorems and proofs. Instead, we took a closer look at the nature of mathematical reasoning as such. We considered such questions as, "What do we mean when we call something self-evident?"; "Are there any ethical axioms?"; "Would it be desirable to be able to deal with moral questions mathematically?", etc.

A second example: in the midst of a discussion on epistemology, a housewife asked: "Why bother about that stuff? What difference can theories of knowledge that philosophers like to split hairs about possibly make to anyone?" The ensuing exchange of opinions did, for once, lead to a conclusion: that theories of knowledge will be reflected in educational systems and methods and thus indirectly play a considerable role in the formation of a person's character and in common character traits of entire communities.

Although today more than 25,000 adults attend Great Books discussions in the United States and Canada; it is of course too early to say what lasting effects the programme will achieve. It is not, however, too early to assert that the programme has provided thousands of persons who take part in these discussions year after year with stimulating experiences at a negligible cost

in terms of money. I know of more than one man or woman whose post-school reading had not gone beyond detective stories or love romances and who, after being persuaded to attend a book discussion, took a renewed interest in the full play of ideas which the world of good books affords. I have also seen some persons change from a narrow, self-righteous bigotry to a more broadly-based and generous attitude toward their fellow men. Above all, it is clear that the discussion group members must enjoy the book meetings, else they would not go on, as so many of them do, devoting their time to them year after year.

This leads me to another point: most groups start out with about twenty or so members—regarded as optimal by The Great Books Foundation. Eight of them usually drop out gradually for a variety of reasons which need not detain us here. But the others stay on. (If the group becomes much smaller, discussion deteriorates into gossip; if much larger, individual members do not get a chance to speak up often enough).

I do have one major quarrel with The Great Books Foundation: its failure, at least to date, to include in its book lists any Eastern works. As I understand it (and I may be quite mistaken), the Foundation believes that Western man cannot gain access to Eastern ideas without special preparations much greater than those necessary for an understanding of any Western thinker, be he Plato or St. Francis. If this is indeed the Foundation's belief, I most emphatically do not share it. For one thing, there is much more Eastern thought in the early (Greek) Western ideas than is generally believed. For another, I believe that what all men have in common as members of the species *homo sapiens* is far more weighty than are the things which divide them.

In 1951 I had a chance to put these ideas to a test. That year, the New York Public Library had to make a special 18-book list for the fifth-year readings of its Great Books discussion programme. (The Great Books Foundation's printer could not guarantee timely delivery of the Foundation's fifth-year selections.) The task of selecting 18 titles was entrusted by the Library to a small committee of which I was a member. Among the books we selected were the *Bhagavad Gita,* Lao Tse's *Tao-te-King* and excerpts from the *Koran.*

Not without some trepidation, I invited an Indian friend to sit in on the discussion of the *Gita*—a discussion by a group hardly any of whose members had ever read that beautiful work. The discussion went extremely well, as did also the discussions on the two other Eastern selections. In fact, the list became so popular that it is still being used occasionally by New York

discussion groups, although the regular Great Books discussion selections for the Fifth Year are now freely available.

If the world's great books are to be living forces they must not be revered and kept under glass. They must be read, thought about and discussed. Only in that way can each one of us really inherit the riches of the past and realise the promises of the present. There are many ways to those goals. One of the most profitable and enjoyable leads through the stimulating companionship of a fine book discussion group.

PICTURES VS. THE MOTHER-TONGUE

BY K. M. WILLEY

"The presentation of the lesson should be exclusively in English at all stages." This is a quotation from an article in *Teaching English,* Vol. II, No. 3, and it upholds a principle that, with some small exceptions which the writer allows, would be upheld by most exponents of modern methods of language teaching. The teacher in the classroom, however, is likely to meet some major difficulties in trying to keep this rule unless he finds suitable teaching aids to assist him. A teacher of a class of boys will not find it difficult to teach "I am sitting" "I am walking" by demonstrating the actions, and from that to "the boy, he . . . ." is easy. But how can "the girl, the woman, she" be introduced? This occurs later when a construction such as "The man is giving a letter to the boy/to him" arises. Translation is not recommended even if it were possible and "she, her, it, its, their" (whether the last refers to the feminine or neuter) all need attention.

Prepared pictures, on the flash-card principle, can help the teacher out of this difficulty and can be used with success for a year's work or more. Twenty pictures, of appropriate size and showing carefully chosen scenes, have been found sufficient. These can be drawn, in thick line, on pieces of Bristol board 10″ x 8″ for a class of 35 ; a larger class will require somewhat larger pictures.

Each sheet can have on it two pictures : one in the left-hand top corner, in very simple outline with no detail, which can be covered with the fingers of the right hand when the large picture only is referred to and held up. Colour can be used, preferably in large masses, as it is sometimes not easy to find something yellow or orange when colours are to be taught. The pictures can show, in action, men, women, boys, girls, babies and some

domestic animals as well as old people contrasted with young, tall with short, fat with thin.

If a year's course is prepared in detail, the cards needed for the lesson can be collected in advance; (for they should be numbered for reference) and it is possible to have on the back of each card, the structure that is to be taught. For instance, in one such collection that has been prepared, Lesson 17 is taught through Cards 1-7. The backs of these cards, to help to remind the teacher of the structure to be taught, are as follows:

Card 1. The man has an axe in his hands.
„ 2. The woman has a spoon in her hand.
„ 2b. „ „ „ an umbrella in her hand.
„ 3. „ boy has a ball in his hands.
„ 3b. „ „ „ „ cap on his head.
„ 4. „ girl „ „ paper on her head.
„ 5. „ baby „ „ toy „ his „
„ 6. „ dog has a stick in its mouth.
„ 7. „ cow has a bird on its back.

while at a further stage, we have:

Card 1. This man works every day.
„ 2. „ woman cooks „ „
„ 3. „ baby sleeps every night........and so on.

A picture of a fat man and a thin boy is used (among many other structures) to illustrate the comparative. "The man is fatter than the boy: the boy is thinner than the man."

If the scheme of work is made according to a detailed syllabus, the pictures can be prepared in advance. They can be pinned up on the blackboard or wall for rapid revision, they can be used for various language games. A simple game, conducted between rival teams, is for the teacher to say "A man smoking" or "A woman cooking" and point to a pupil, while counting ten quickly. The questioned pupil should point to the appropriate picture and say "There's a man smoking" to gain a point for his team. No answer in time and no point is given, but there are no penalties.

The preparation of such cards is one of the many cases in teaching where a little foresight, together with some work in advance, enables the teacher to be prepared not only for good quality work but also against any emergency of having to take a lesson before the usual time or without any reading books or in the presence of some person of importance. What is more important is that children enjoy the work and do well at it.

General Service English Wall Pictures with Teacher's Handbook. Longmans, Rs. 52.

Teachers often find it difficult to get enough practice of the essential structures of the language in real life situations. They are forced to take refuge in the book to teach what cannot be seen and handled in the classroom. Yet, for a living and fluent knowledge of a language, it is essential to deal with clearly perceived situations in the language, in such a way that each separate structure is made familiar before turning to the lesson in the book that introduces it. The use of pictures is one way to extend the possibilities of the classroom; but pictures, unless they are specially planned for language teaching, are soon exhausted.

The need for a carefully prepared set of pictures, designed to present a comprehensive vocabulary in a wide variety of situations, has long been felt. Shortly before he died Professor Gatenby, in collaboration with C. E. Eckersley, saw through the press a set of eight pictures which had been drawn to illustrate all the picturable words contained in the General Service List of English words, which lists the 2,000 words and common structures that are generally recognised as the essential foundation for the learning of English as a foreign language. A Teacher's Handbook shows how the words and structures can be introduced, and gives help too in associating with them and bringing into use what cannot be seen, such as the sounds and smells and the non-picturable words such as "happy", "dangerous", "hungry" and "tired".

One valuable warning is given ; that no picture should be used to show what can easily be seen and handled in the classroom or just outside it ; the classroom is a limited environment but few teachers exploit it fully. The handbook is, therefore, divided into nine sections and the first place is given to the classroom environment with the advice that no picture should be used until most of the resources of the classroom in vocabulary and situation have been exhausted. Another valuable piece of advice is that such wall-pictures should not be used for decoration but kept rolled up until they are needed for teaching, so that they are always fresh when they are in use.

The price may at first seem high, but careful collaboration between the teachers of different classes would make it un-

necessary for a school to possess more than one set. The language teaching in a school that has a set need never be dull, so long as it is based on oral exploitation of the objects and situations contained in the pictures, and related to the classroom situation at every point.

QUESTION BOX

1. I should be grateful if you could give a few addresses of the Institutes for Research in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (like the one at the London University).

Although we do not know of any other Institutes for research in the teaching of English as a foreign language, valuable research work has been done in Australia and Canada and also at Ann Arbor University, Michigan.

2. Kindly suggest the technique of teaching the passive voice. An article on this topic contributed by you will be extremely helpful.

In teaching the Passive Voice one must remember that we use the Passive when our attention is concentrated more on the action and the result of it than on the doer. If we examine a large number of passive sentences, we shall notice therefore, that it is relatively seldom, that an active verb in the sentence would have suited the situation, or the speaker's view of it, just as well as a passive one.

One can begin to introduce the Passive Voice by using past participles as adjectives over a fairly long period, without comment: "this chair is broken," "the door is shut," "my coat is mended," "your shirt is torn," etc. The next step is to show that a note-book is covered with brown paper and another is covered with newspaper and then ask questions such as "What is your note-book covered with, Govind?" "It's covered with newspaper." "And what is Gopal's note-book covered with?" "It's covered with an old calendar." "What is that tree covered with?" "It's covered with leaves," etc. When a good deal of this has been done one can go on to ask, "What are blackboards painted with?" "They are painted with black paint" and "What are words written with on the blackboard?" "They are written with chalk." "What have those words been written with?" "They have been written with chalk." "And what has this blackboard been painted with?" "It has been painted with black paint," the teacher helping with the answers where necessary and allowing no analysis or reflection until correct answers are almost automatic. Gradually the teacher may go on to "Who

was this written by?" "It was written by me," and he can do this all round the class pointing to a piece of writing done by each boy in turn; though a good deal of the practice, once a habit has begun to be formed, can be done by the quicker pupils in groups.

Above all, when the teacher comes to the stage at which he can set exercises of converting active sentences into passive, some time after giving the introduction sketched above, he should see that all the sentences he gives for conversion are better in the passive than in the active, and he will notice that comparatively few need the mention of the agent, or the subject of the active verb, with "by". The best way to guard against nonsense being written is to choose natural passive sentences and put them into the active voice for re-conversion.

3. Mr. C. C. Fries differentiates between the statements and response patterns. The answer to "What is this ?", says he, is "It is a pen," and not "This is a pen." Is this distinction maintained in the normal speech in England ?

The correct form of response to "What is this ?" is "It is a book," and also to "Is this a book?" "Yes, it is." The word "this" would only be used in the answers if there were some doubt as to which of several articles was being asked about, when the answerer would lift up one of them and say "This is a book" and perhaps add, lifting or pointing to another object, "But this is a pen."

4. In the first year of English Mr. C. C. Fries uses the "going to" future in place of "shall" and "will", e.g. I am going to go to Detroit tomorrow. Do you recommend the use of such a future ?

The use of the "going to" future is perfectly correct, but I prefer, personally, not to teach it first because it has a rather particular use and significance, including, with the idea of futurity, the idea, also, that we are speaking of a plan that has been decided upon. In my experience relatively complex sentence patterns may be easy to teach in relation to simple situations or ideas, whereas apparently simple forms of words are difficult to teach in relation to a complex situation or idea. If people get used to using the "going to" form as if it were the only future tense they produce from time to time grotesque or even impolite sentences:

When a Justice makes a mistake,
it becomes the law of the land.

When a Doctor makes a mistake,
it becomes his diagnosis.

When an Architect makes a mistake,
it becomes his design.

But
When a Printer makes a mistake,
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